

BRIAN K. VAUGHAN
FIONA STAPLES



CHAPTER
TWENTY

Saga

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Saga

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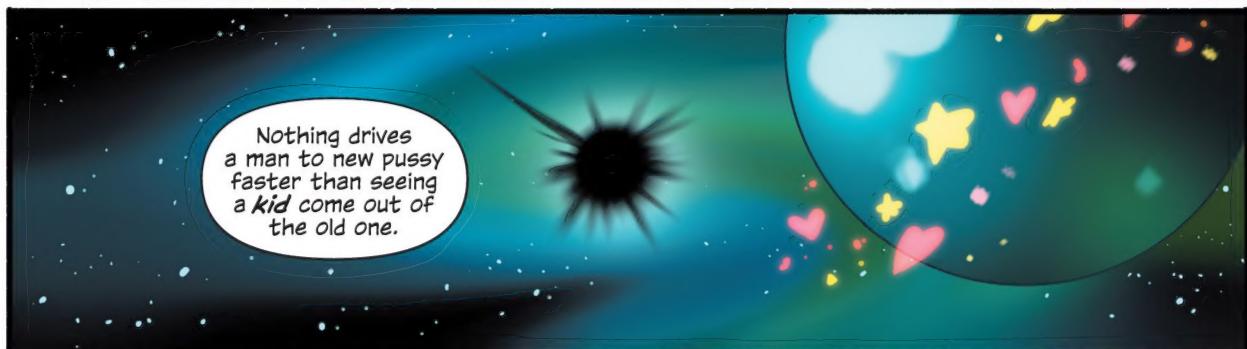
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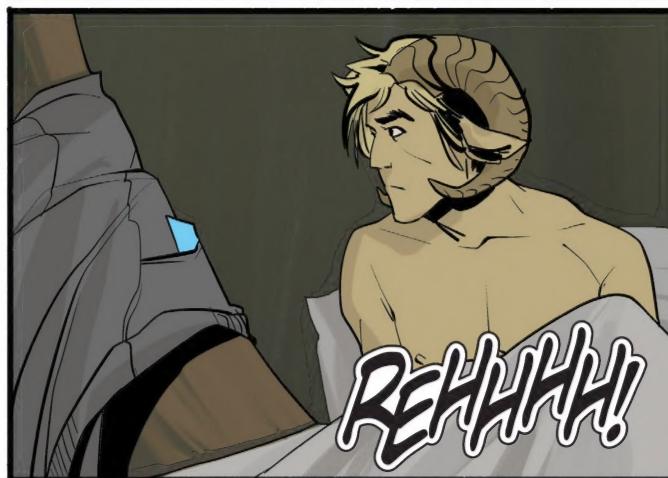
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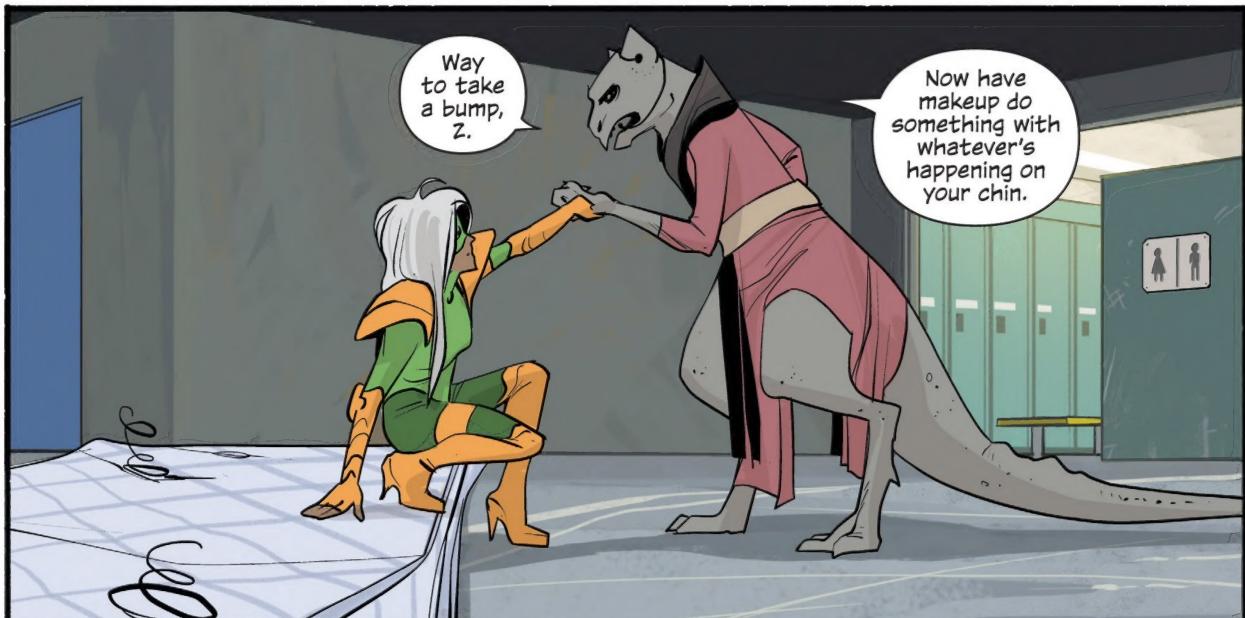








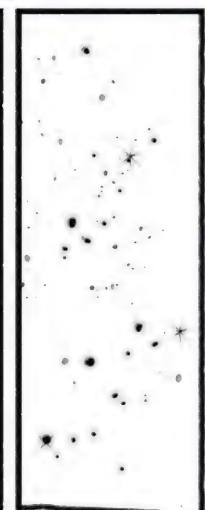
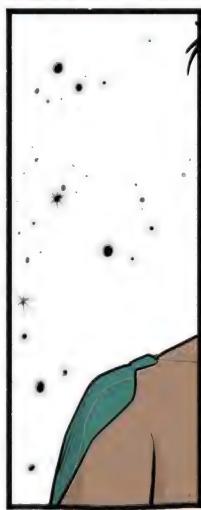
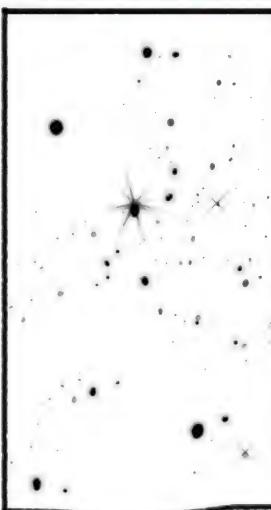
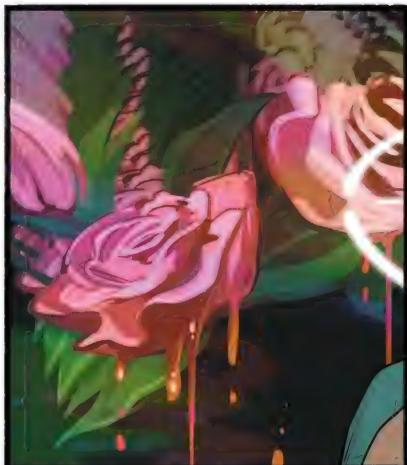


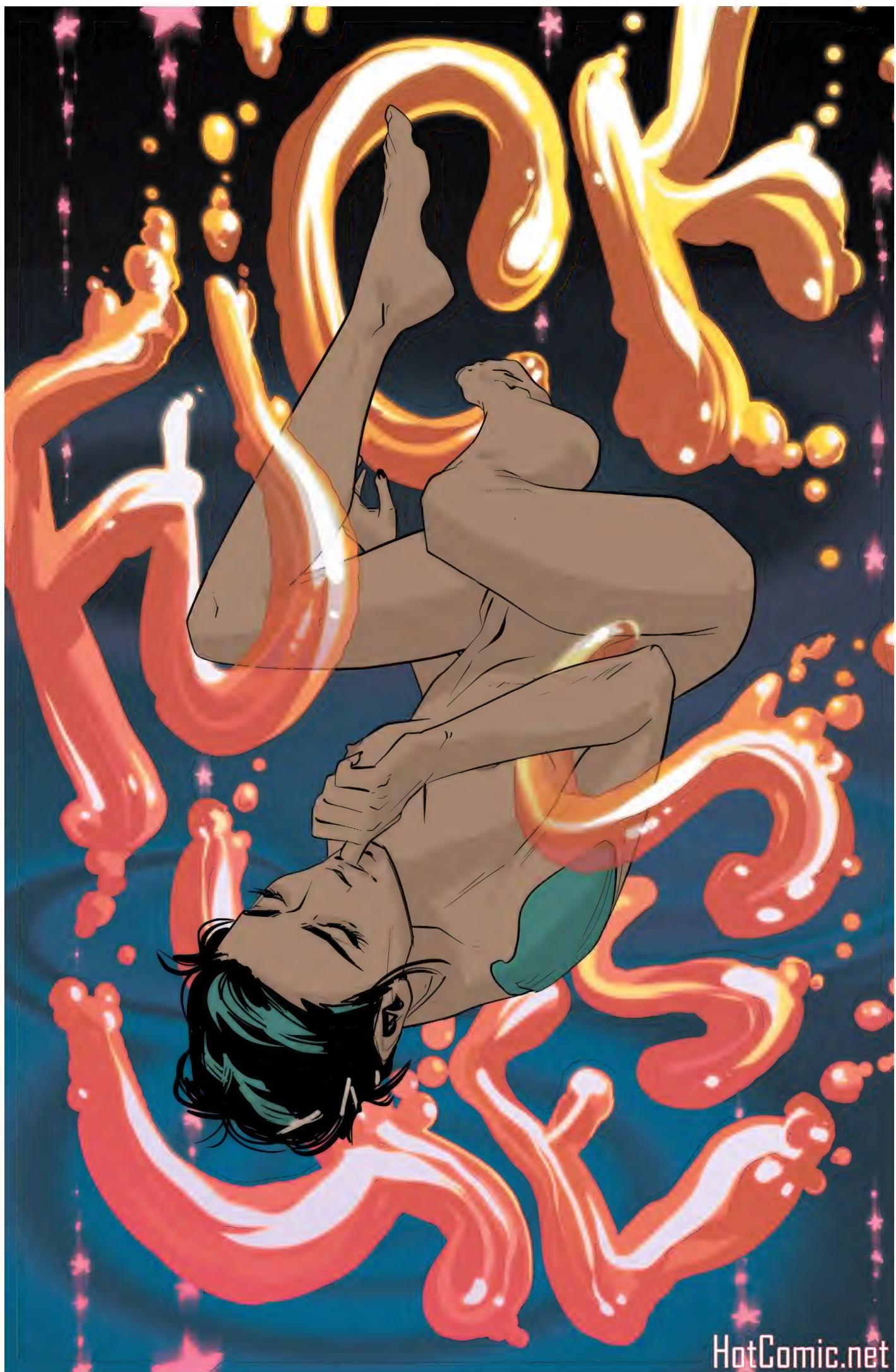








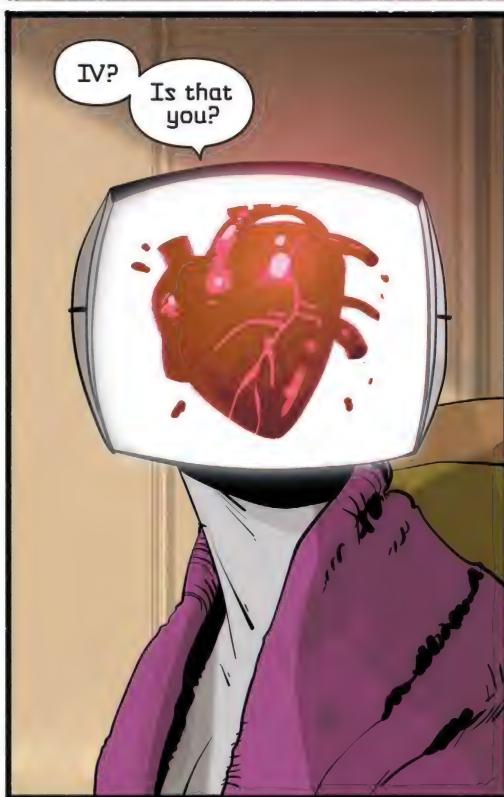


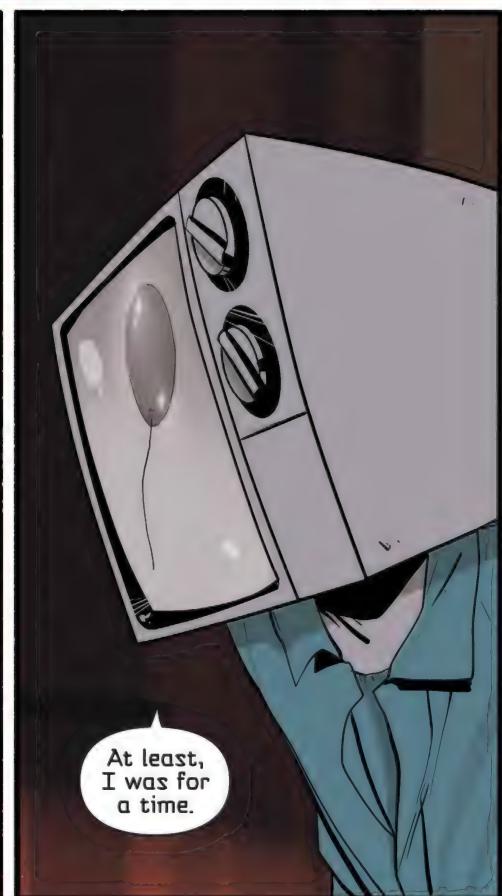
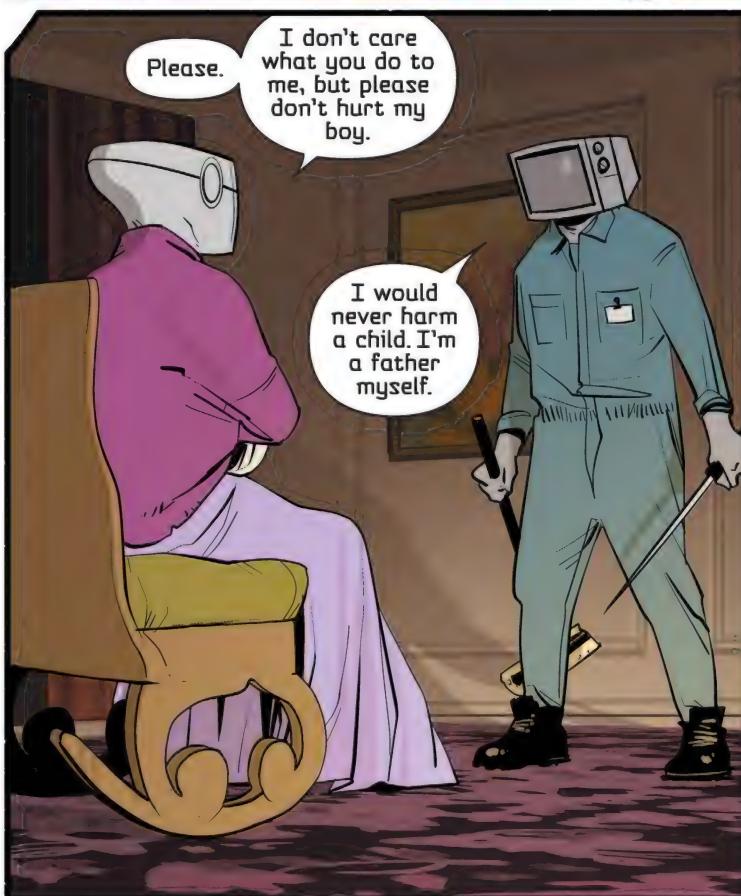


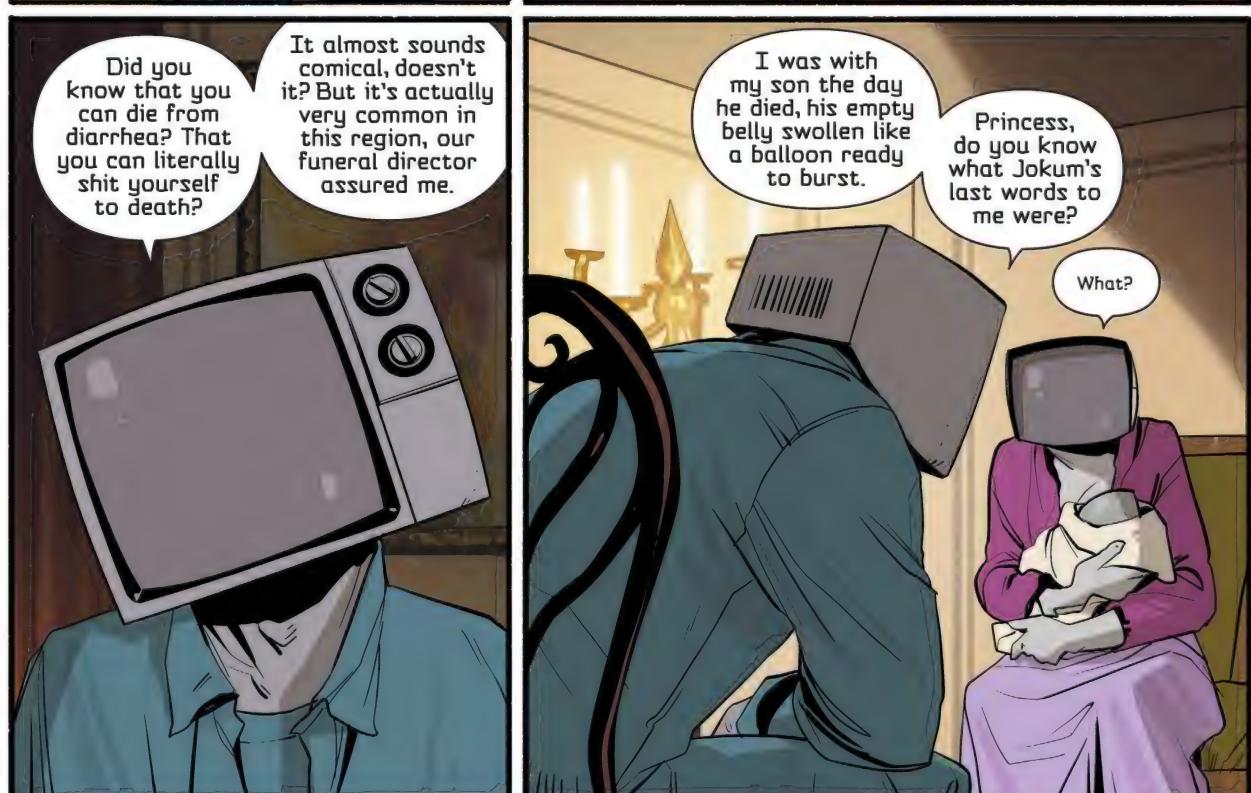
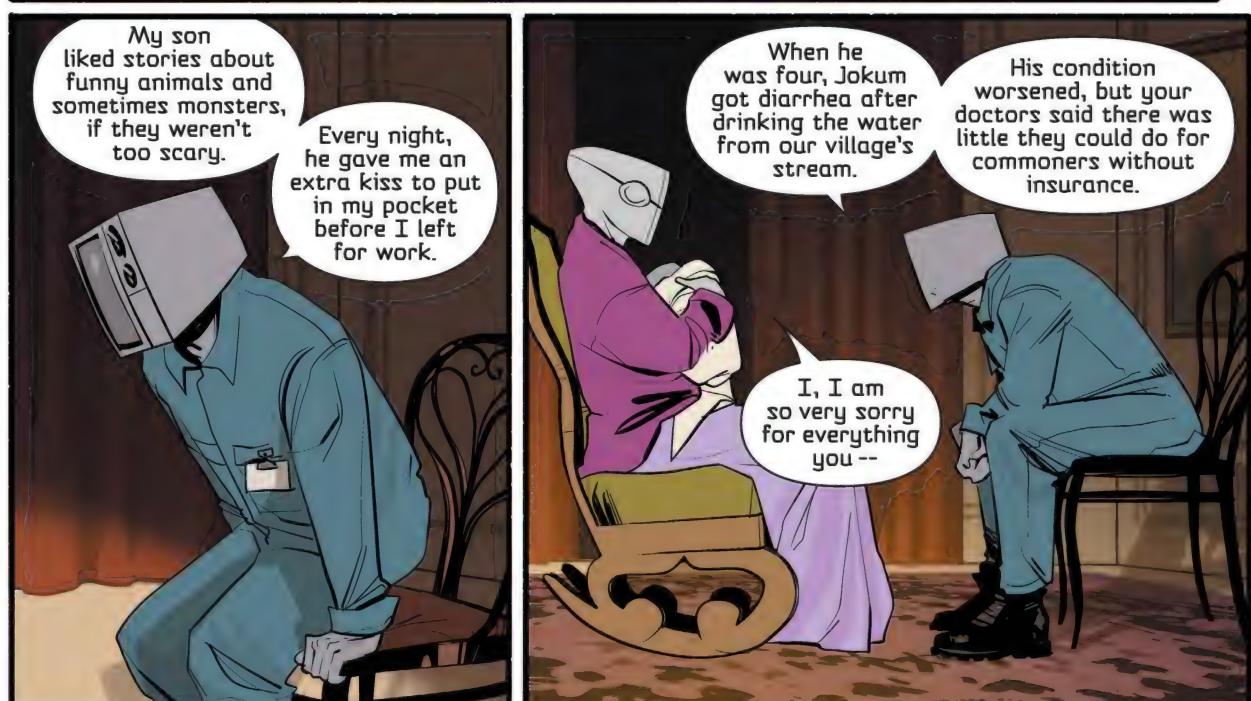


















TO BE CONTINUED

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Not to change the subject from that downer of an ending, but do you guys hate alternate covers to your comics?

Brian here, and I'm not normally a huge fan of them myself. Maybe you can't judge a book by its cover, but you can sure as hell judge a comic. And along with being staggeringly beautiful and instantly iconic, Fiona's covers for *Saga* have always been a vitally important part of each story, setting the tone and more. So even when our early issues sold out and we had to do new printings, our fearless letterer/designer Fonografiks slightly tweaked the logo or trade dress, but we'd always maintain Fiona's original image.

Still, I know some readers love alternate covers, and we dipped our toes in that pool with Chapter Seven's "Ghost Variant" featuring Paul Pope's gorgeous rendition of The Stalk. And as thanks to the retailers who made our success possible, we printed a few hundred exclusive versions of Chapter One with our original teaser image, and Fiona and Fonografiks also made a "signed" black-and-white version of Chapter Nineteen's Zipless cover just for store owners, but that's about it.

Anyway, I bring this up now because when I first started pitching this series to media mogul/Image partner Robert Kirkman, he joked that we should do 25 different covers if the book ever survived to Chapter Twenty-five. That seemed pretty farfetched back in the day, but more than two years later, that milestone is now right around the corner. And suddenly, the idea of seeing lots of different artists doing their versions of Fiona's creations (in a way that doesn't impact our story) sounds like it could be really cool, especially if all of the covers were normally priced and equally available to everybody who wanted one.

But I wouldn't want to explore this if it's something that you guys don't really want. Multiple covers can help boost a book's sales in the short term, but I always worry about the long-term impact of stores getting stuck with lots of unsold copies with various covers that can confuse old readers and alienate potential new ones. So if this just sounds like an epically crass marketing ploy to a majority of you, we'll forget about it. Or maybe punt the decision to Chapter Fifty?

Either way, let's agree to blame Kirkman for whatever happens.

For now, I'm writing this a few days before Chapter Nineteen comes out and gives birth all over the place, so the *To Be Continued* mailbox is still mostly vacant. As we patiently await your responses to our new arc, not to mention your entries to our **Second Annual Saga Costume Contest** detailed last letter column, let's check in with some stragglers still processing the previous several issues...

Team *Saga*,

Can't stop thinking about Mouse Medic. I'm livid. She must

be avenged! Where was her DAMN MASK!?!?

Brandon

Irvine, CA

P.S. Love the comic

Yeah, I realize the hullabaloo with Chapter Twelve was mostly over what naughty stuff flashed across Prince Robot IV's face for a couple of panels, but I agree that Fiona's brutal depiction of that poor medic's final moments was the real takeaway of the issue. Clearly, IV hasn't forgotten the things he saw during combat either.

Hello from Moscow!

Just wanted to say how I enjoy reading *Saga* (it's my second series only and I think I should look for more comics and hope to find something as engaging as *Saga*). I love real mail too, so here's a postcard with a cool retro cosmonaut. It was printed before Gagarin's flight and looks rather weird.

Anyway, thank you!

Sasha

Moscow, Russia

Spasibo, Sasha! I recently read that your homeland is one of the fastest growing markets for English-language comic books in the world, so I'm curious how many of your fellow Russians are reading our book, and where they may have found it. Drop us a postcard, won't you?

Dear *Saga* Team,

I am currently writing this letter from my dorm lounge because I walked in on my roommate who had (sensual tone) "company" over. So I awkwardly gathered a few things and ran out. Instinctively, *Saga* #18 was one of the few things I grabbed because boy did I need to give it a re-read.

Anyway, I decided I'd give my roommate and his friend an hour or two, so I read *Saga* and was like, "I got time to kill, why not read the letters to the editor?" I was taken aback by the guy in prison asking for *Saga* issues, but really, if I was in prison, comics would probably be my top priority too. I started crying in said lounge reading that one letter from Hana about their friend "Porkchop" who died. (I am so sorry for your loss, your letter broke my heart.) My heart goes out to Ian & Jodi for all the unfortunate things that happened to them, but I literally grabbed my heart when the letter shared how their lives really turned around.

Reading all these letters made me realize that single issues really are superior to trades/collected volumes. In single issues you get the additional experience of hearing what fans have to say about the series and you get to hear their quirky little quips related to something that you love and just wow thank you for bringing *Saga* into existence.

Sincerely,
Maximillian Jansen
New Paltz, NY

Many thanks, Maximillian. We agree with you completely about these individual issues being superior to the collected editions... but mostly because they're more profitable for us, not because they happen to feature dumb letters like this next one:

Dear BKV,

It's time for our first annual WRITERS SURVEY! This was sent to every famous comic book writer and they all answered so now you have to, too.

- 1) How much money do you make?
- 2) Which living comic book writer do you hate the most and why?
- 3) What is your mother's maiden name?
- 4) If you could live on one fictional planet, which would it be?
 - a) Dagobah
 - b) Pluto
 - c) Spectra, the diamond planet from Rainbow Brite and the Star Stealer.
- 5) What percentage of "fan" letters in To Be Continued do you write yourself?

Love,
Vida Van Daugh

Well well well, if it isn't my old nemesis, Vida Van Daugh. I normally ignore your snark, Vida, but you've discovered the one thing I'm powerless against: a list of numbered questions.

- 1) Slightly less than Robert Kirkman
- 2) Robert Kirkman; see above
- 3) Same as yours, oddly enough
- 4) The only one that's home to something called a "meat flower"
- 5) I made up that whole marriage proposal thing a few issues back, but the rest of these are pretty legit

And speaking of our beloved annual Reader Survey that Vida is so rudely mocking...

Dear Mr. Vaughan,

In response to your offhand question, "Where the hell can I get some psychedelic mushrooms?" at the bottom of section 12 in your summation of responses to the 2013 Saga Reader Survey: I might be able to help you with that.

I'm not a dealer. Far from it—I'm a (mostly) law-abiding, good-natured person who has no desire to make money by selling illicit substances... That being said, I have this bad habit of buying and hoarding drugs just in case I ever get invited to a sweet '60s party or the world ends.

That reminds me. You live in LA. Don't you already have unlimited access to every drug ever? I mean, if movies have taught me anything, it's that you So-Cal people are replete with drugs. So I have a hard time imagining that you're so desperate for shrooms that you'd resort to putting out a call to any hapless readers of the letters section at the back of your comic book.

All of that notwithstanding, I have saved up enough magic mushrooms for about 3 (maybe 4) people to be tripping

serious balls. I would be both honored and willing to drive from my place in Reno down to southern California to share my stock with you, if you were ever to invite me to a sweet '60s party down there.

Nolan
Reno, NV

I know this is a terrible idea, but now I kind of have to do it, right?

Mr. Vaughan,

I read *Saga* #1 when it first came out in print. It was okay. I decided to pass on your series. I LOVE *Y: The Last Man*. I'm currently rereading it in the deluxe edition format hardcovers. I gave all the singles to a friend as a gift years ago.

Comixology had a sale on the first several issues awhile back. I tried *Saga* again, reading issues back-to-back. I FELL IN LOVE.

In regards to your readership ages, well, I'm 41 years old, male, and hamburgers are yummy.

I read *Saga* digitally to get the price drop since I'm on disability, fighting terminal cancer. *Saga* gives me joy...

Sophea UK
Salem, OR

P.S. The "h" is silent; blame it on Cambodians.

Thanks, Sophea, but fuck that terminal cancer noise. Keep fighting. And stay in touch, please.

Dear Brian, Fiona,

My wife and I were watching this documentary about Stephen Sondheim the other evening and he was discussing a problematic song he'd written called "Can That Boy Fox-Trot!" (Stay with me now.)

He explained, rather obviously, that the humor of the title (repeated many times throughout the song) depends upon the listener's ear anticipating a very different "f-word" than "fox-trot." Now, he went on, this might be funny the first time. The second time you kind of go, "Well, ok..." After the eighth or ninth time, it's worn out its welcome and isn't funny at all.

He then got to his point: the song was ultimately cut because the important thing, he said, was that the audience not feel cheated. They shouldn't feel like someone took their money for the sake of a lazy joke. "They should feel," he said, "as if they've been given a meal."

Well, I've just finished reading *Saga* #17 and I'd just like to say (and this is applicable to every issue): Thank you for the meal.

Best,
Robert G.
Glenside, PA

I'll be honest, Robert, I have no clue what the hell you're talking about. But *Assassins* is definitely my favorite musical, so... thanks?

Dear beloved *Saga* creators,

My girlfriend is allergic to cats.

We've been living a long-distance relationship since I had to take a job in Boston (she is still in NYC). Like so many others who write in, it seems, *Saga* has been one of the things we've

shared and loved together, a way to stay close even when we're apart. Boston to NYC may not be too far compared to others' longer distances, but to us it can feel like Wreath to Landfall, which is plenty far.

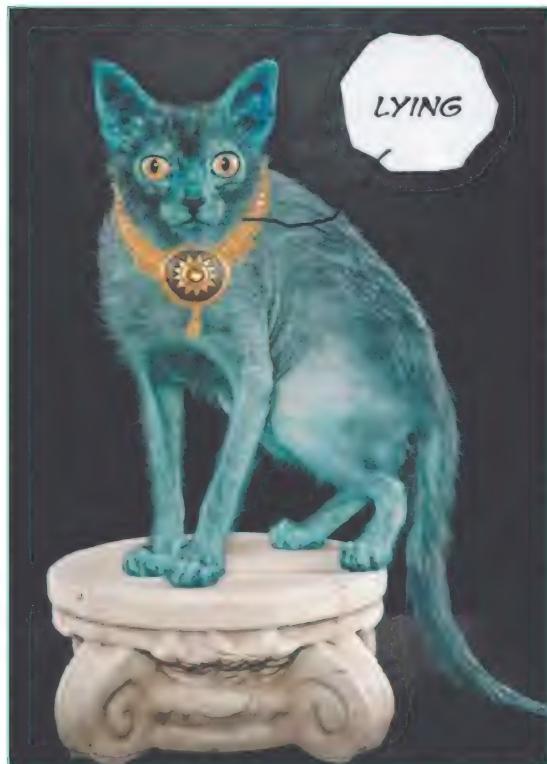
So anyway, after TWO YEARS, Miriam (aforementioned girlfriend) is planning to move to Boston! But what to do about a pet, as I've always wanted to get a cat? Thankfully, Saga has given us an option agreeable to cat-lovers and Saga-loving-allergic-cat-haters alike: GET A HAIRLESS CAT AND DYE IT BLUE. It'd be hypoallergenic and easy to name!

Well, it seemed like a reasonable idea (reason is relative) until we started Googling true life tattooed cats and getting increasingly freaked out by actual hairless cats. I also used my amateur Photoshop skills to mock up a "real" lying Cat (photo enclosed) and boy to I prefer your fictional creation/rendering. We'll be getting a dog, I think.

Thanks for the wonderful characters and stories, which we can't wait to read about together from Boston by the time the next story arc begins. We love you guys!

Sincerely,
Ryan M.

(and the true-life lying Cat that is never to be!
Allston, MA



Yikes. Good call with the dog, Ryan. And safe travels to Miriam.

Dear Brian and Fiona,

I'm an engineering professor who developed my comics habit in grad school. I remember reading the series finale of Y: the Last Man while babysitting one of the experiments that made it into my dissertation. I can't tell you how much I've been enjoying Saga. I'm completely in love with (and terrified for) several characters, and I appreciate how they each have their own compelling voices and stories, but I've gotta say that my surprise favorites since the last arc are Upsher and Doff. For one thing, I love how invested they are in what they

do. I think my own job is awesome because I get to show my students neat things about thermodynamics and help create new knowledge, etc., but it's also made me a massive whore for things like grant money, tenure and publishable data, so I especially enjoyed Upsher's reaction to getting shot in pursuit of a story. Since they're another successful couple who can't be open about their relationship at home, I hope they do cross paths with Alana, Marko and Hazel one day, and that no one's brain explodes.

Now, a burning question: why is Heist the only person who uses a last name? Are last names not generally used in this galaxy? How do they keep track of each other in large groups? What about families? Do they do the Icelandic thing? I've been thinking about this way too much.

Thanks for reading my fangirl rambling, and thanks for what you do.

Jennie
Anchorage, AK

P.S. I felt like I should send something Alaskan, so enjoy some bumper stickers from my place of employ! We're the Seawolves, by the way.

Thanks for the sweet bumper stickers, Jennie, as well as the thoughtful question. I'll just say that names and titles and how they're inherited are all very important in the Saga universe, as we began to learn in the Robot Kingdom last issue. Stay tuned for more hard-hitting nomenclature-related world-building.

Mr. Vaughan & Ms. Staples,

Since your call for letters from the armed forces, I have yet to see one from my branch, the US Navy. I'm composing this aboard my ship in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, in the middle of a war we have been in for most of my career.

So many of the people who write you seem to relate to the story in some way, and I think that's what makes it so great. Such a diverse group can all see some aspect of themselves in your work, and that never ceases to amaze me. I myself am not immune.

I have been serving now for 15 years, and the country has been at war for most of it. I'm not on the front lines every day, but there isn't an aspect of my life, or society as a whole, that the conflict hasn't touched. I can feel it hanging over me constantly, like the Sword of Damocles. I may not always agree with it, and I certainly realize that what I do is a direct cause of the deaths of my fellow human beings (a fact that has caused me serious psychological trauma on more than one occasion), but I continue to do it. Why? Many reasons. Seability. Pay. Skills training. But mostly, because I have a family.

This is where I have to disagree with Alana, I'm afraid. There is a great quote, which has been attributed to many people, but was most likely said by George Washington: "I shall be a soldier, so that my son may be a merchant. And his son may be a farmer. And his son, a poet."

I've never heard it put better. I do this, as any parent does anything, so that my children don't have to. So that, perhaps, a military won't even be necessary in their future. So that my daughter will have a better life.

The trick, and perhaps that is why Alana is so bitter, is to not let it affect you negatively. I never tell my little girl that "I'm doing this thing I sometimes hate just to take care of you." And I never bring my frustration or anger from work home with me.

I try not to be the monster Alana's father was.

In short, I want to say thank you. Thank you for crafting a story that is both visually stunning and incredibly rich and complex. Something that touches my heart, makes me think, and (silly as it sounds) pleases my eye.

As you can imagine, storage space is limited on a warship. *Saga* is such an incredible story, however, that it is one of only three comics I chose to bring with me; giving up space for souvenirs, music, and even underwear. It is well worth the trouble of doing laundry more often to have such literature on hand.

My only frustration stems from the fact that issue #17 was the last one I got my mitts on before departing for a 6 month deployment. And there aren't a whole lot of comic shops out here where I am. Fortunately, my LCS (Heroes & Villains) is hanging on to my stuff for me, for when I get back. So while I will have to wait until the end of the summer to find out how this cliffhanger resolves, at least I'll have a few more issues along with it to read (and perhaps a Letter of the Month) to show to Richard, mentioning his shop.

Lastly, I hope Hamburger is doing well recovering from his surgery. I wish him a speedy and total recovery. I will close with what I think is perhaps the highest praise one can give a comic's creative team. You fine folks keep writing (and drawing) them, and I'll keep reading them.

Sincerely,

EMC Timothy Van Kleeck, VSN
Aboard USS Elrod (FFG 55)

P.S. I was going to include a bribe for Hamburger, to help get a Letter of the Month, but I couldn't find anything out here that I thought was safe. Instead, I'm sending a unit patch from the ship, and all of us out here that love your work.

Wow, that was an outstanding letter, Master Chief. Thank you, we're honored to be allowed to take up a little space on your warship.

If it were up to me, this would be a slam-dunk Letter of the Month... but my dachshund/arbitrator Hamburger K. Vaughan feels that your polite attempt at bribery is nevertheless a clear violation of both the Uniform Code of Military Justice and of maritime tradition. Sorry not to send you any tchotchkes in exchange for your awesome unit patch, but be grateful Burger is sparing you a keelhaul, I guess.

Dear Fiona and Brian,

Thank you for *Saga*. Today is my birthday and I am thinking that my best present is having the time to write you to say that I love and admire everything about the comic.

During the last two years I have lived in Vienna. I am from Mexico City. The last year a friend told me about *Saga*, he said I should download the first issue free from the Image site. After that, I compulsively searched in a lot of comic stores here in Vienna without success until one guy told me about a bookstore in downtown called Morawa with a big comic section "in Englisch." I found volumes one and two, I finished them in eleven days, one issue each day which was a little hard.

I was flying to visit my family in Mexico last January so I went to my favorite comic shop for numbers thirteen to seventeen. On my second day there I had the five issues and said to myself: one issue every Sunday. My patience was tested to the limits, I really stuck to the plan but the second Sunday I was angry because it was number fourteen with the survey and I would have liked to send some answers.

After number seventeen I was anxious on how to get number eighteen: download or paper. The first one was feasible, at any instant while the latter needed more time but it was my preferred option. So I found a comic shop that ordered it but it arrived two weeks later. I went back one time and these Austrians told me it will take another week, ok! But I was flying the following week to India.

Finally here is the story I wanted to tell: on my way back, the last flight was from Dubai to Vienna. Something strange happened that four people were kicked out from the plane, their luggage searched and a lot of delayed hours. At this time I only wanted to arrive in Vienna to pick up my number eighteen and suddenly I became identified with The Will... among Mexico, Austria and India I am searching in different worlds to try to find Alana, Marko and Hazel.

Cheers!

Mariano Rodriguez
Vienna, Austria

Man, I wasn't sure where your letter was heading, Mariano, but you eventually tied your storylines together tighter than the ending of a *Seinfeld* episode. For your tireless questing, Hamburger has named YOU winner of this month's thingamabobs from the Almighty Prize Drawer: a signed copy of this very issue, a sweet bumper sticker from Alaska, and an awesome unit patch from the USS Elrod (sorry, time to restock the Prize Drawer).

That's it for this month, but I'll meet you back here in July, as our story takes an even darker turn. Hooray for showbiz.

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BKV



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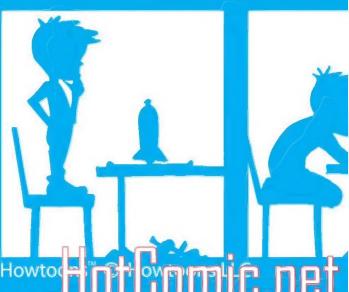
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